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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 54th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 10 April 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES, INCLUDING:

(a) QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CYPRUS

(agenda item 10) (continued) (E/CN.4/1997/5, 6 and Add.1 and 2, 8, 9, 12 and Corr.1 and Add.1 and Corr.1, 48-50, 51 and Add.1, 52-54, 55 and Corr.1, 56-59, 60 and Add.1, 61, 62 and Add.1, 63, 64, 113, 114, 118, 123-125, 129 and 132; E/CN.4/1997/NGO/3-5, 6, 12, 14-17, 21, 25, 27 and 37; A/51/457, 460, 466, 478, 479, 481, 490, 496, 538 and 542/Add.2)

1. Mr. TARMIDZI (Indonesia) said that, in past discussions of the current item, rhetoric had unfortunately prevailed over genuine dialogue, closing off the avenue towards tangible results. Human rights problems were extremely complex, and no country could claim a perfect record. Yet it was the obligation of each and every Government to take adequate steps to deal with all violations and address their root causes.

2. Some developed countries apparently felt entitled, however, to target developing countries for violating human rights, resorting to the false prism of their own experience to pass judgement on entirely different situations. They overlooked the fact that their own political, economic and social institutions had evolved over centuries, the same length of time that developing countries had been under colonial domination. Current events in some of the developing countries cited as human rights violators called for tolerance and thoughtfulness rather than destructive criticism; greater efforts should be made to ensure respect for human rights in accordance with the state of each country's social, economic and political development.

3. Indonesia's human rights record in East Timor was far from perfect, but the abuses that had occurred were a simple deviation from the policy set out by his Government. It was totally untrue to assert, as had some non-governmental organizations (NGOs), that the human rights abuses of 12 November 1991 still continued or that there had been no improvement in the situation in East Timor. In that connection, he quoted a remark by the Assistant Secretary of State for the United States of America, Mr. Shattuck, who had visited East Timor in March 1997.

4. His Government was committed to cooperating fully with all human rights mechanisms and would consider the possibility of inviting the Commission's special mechanisms at an appropriate time. Such a decision was, of course, entirely the prerogative of a sovereign State. A number of representatives of such mechanisms had indeed quite recently visited Indonesia, including East Timor.

5. His Government would honour the understanding reached on the upgrading of the current Memorandum of Intent on technical cooperation with the Centre for Human Rights to a Memorandum of Understanding. It had already submitted a

counter-proposal for that document, setting out the terms of reference and stipulating the appointment to the office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Djakarta of a programme officer with the sole mandate of supervising the implementation of the technical cooperation agreement. It was unfortunate that certain quarters wilfully sought to subvert the process by forcibly introducing monitoring mechanisms.

6. Although the targeted victim of the campaign of negative criticism launched at the current session was Indonesia, the first and real victim was truth. By resorting to a scurrilous campaign of defamation, the spreaders of such falsehoods had abandoned the noble objective of promoting and protecting human rights.

7. Mr. SARMIENTO (Colombia), said that his Government had always openly recognized its failings in the field of human rights, a candour that was driving its search for solutions to the problems it was currently facing. The Office of the Procurator-General had been making extraordinary efforts to identify and punish those who violated human rights and international humanitarian law, irrespective of their position within the State and society, and those efforts had been acknowledged by the international community.

8. Impunity certainly existed in Colombia, though not to the extent suggested by statistics prepared by technocrats, in which justice was measured exclusively on the basis of punishment. To eliminate impunity, efforts were being made to modernize the Office of the Procurator-General and improve its use of technology. The decision of the High Council of Justice to empower the military courts to hear cases involving human rights violations had been publicly challenged on legal grounds, and that would help to circumscribe the limits of military jurisdiction. The Procurator-General prosecuted both State agents and private citizens who violated human rights and international humanitarian law. A number of governmental bodies were fighting beside his Office to forge a more congenial future for the country.

9. He appealed to the international community and the NGOs for assistance in making that endeavour viable. While welcoming the laudable work done by NGOs, he urged them to refrain from negativism and to acknowledge that the climate prevailing in his country, particularly following the establishment of a branch Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights there, justified hope that the current rough patch of history would soon be left behind.

10. Mr. LANGMAN (Observe for Australia) said it was most regrettable that several countries continued to obstruct the Commission's human rights monitoring functions and responsibilities. Instances of such obstruction had been seen recently in Nigeria, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Cuba.

11. The recent upsurge in violence in Algeria demonstrated the urgent need to resolve the conflict and restore respect for human rights there. In Burma, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) should try to resolve through negotiation its differences with the political opposition, including ethnic groups. It should release all political prisoners and detainees unconditionally and allow political groups and representative organizations to engage in the full range of normal political activities.

12. China had made welcome progress in implementing economic and social rights, democratizing local government structures, ensuring freedom of movement and instituting a more effective administrative legal system. His Government would hope, however, to see improvements with regard to restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, religious freedom and the detention of dissidents.

13. The Government of Indonesia was making a serious effort to address human rights abuses in East Timor and Irian Jaya, and the police were being given a greater role in the handling of internal security matters.

14. His Government recognized the difficulties posed for Papua New Guinea by the continuing conflict on Bougainville. It firmly believed there was no military solution to the conflict, and thus welcomed the decision by the Government of Papua New Guinea to abandon the proposed use of mercenaries on Bougainville. All parties to the dispute should observe international human rights standards and seize the current opportunity to work for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

15. There was continuing evidence of religious intolerance in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Australia strongly protested at the recent confirmation by the Iranian Supreme Court of death sentences for apostasy against two members of the Baha'i faith.

16. The political stalemate in Cyprus continued and tension was rising because of recent incidents on the ceasefire line and the military build-up on the island. His Government supported the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus and found in the set of ideas proposed by the Secretary-General a basis for a just and peaceful solution.

17. The Nigerian Government must ensure that the pro-democracy activists charged in March 1997 with treason and the Ogoni supporters had early access to legal representation and that the legal process was carried out openly. His delegation supported the appointment of a special rapporteur to investigate those and other human rights issues.

18. The persistent violence and human rights violations in Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire had resulted in a massive refugee problem in the Great Lakes region. Much still had to be done to bring to justice the perpetrators of the genocide in Rwanda in April 1994. His Government deplored the recent killing of human rights officials and aid workers, deaths which had dealt a severe blow to human rights protection in Rwanda.

19. Acknowledging the Sri Lankan Government's efforts to improve human rights in a difficult security environment, he said that much still remained to be done. Human rights education in the security forces and measures to minimize civilian casualties in military offensives were to be commended, but continuing efforts must be made in those areas.

20. It was regrettable that the second visit to the country concerned by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan had had to be abruptly terminated. Continuing violations of human rights by the Government

of the Sudan remained a cause for concern: It should implement fully the recommendations of the various Special Rapporteurs and all parties to the conflict should work towards a non-violent solution.

21. Lastly, his Government welcomed the draft law adopted by the Turkish Parliament in March 1997 that promised to reduce detention periods and improve the access of detainees to legal representation.

22. Mr. ZISWILER (Observer for Switzerland) said he noted that the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had been obliged to submit to the authorities of a wide range of countries urgent appeals on behalf of 2,400 individuals. Far too many States had not replied to his communications, and none of the nine countries he had approached had agreed to allow him to make an on-site fact-finding mission in 1996.

23. The death penalty figured among the possible violations of the right to life. In 1992, Switzerland had abolished capital punishment for all crimes and was a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. His delegation therefore welcomed the fact that a number of other countries had also abolished the death penalty. It was likewise encouraging that the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda had excluded the application of the death penalty even for such abominable offences as genocide and crimes against humanity.

24. States that maintained the death penalty on the grounds that it deterred criminals should at the very least respect the international standards regulating or limiting its application. Such standards included the obligation to apply the death penalty only to the most serious crimes; the requirement of due process, the right of individuals sentenced to death to appeal for a pardon or commutation of the sentence, and the prohibition of the death penalty for persons under 18 years of age and pregnant women.

25. Mr. MOHAMED (Observer for the Sudan) noted that the tempo of allegations against his country in connection with slavery had risen from early 1995, when a political campaign against the Government had been stepped up by certain circles. The literature of one NGO, Christian Solidarity International, stated point blank that the slavery charges were to be used as motivation for the goal of overthrowing the Sudanese regime. In pursuit of that goal, representatives of the organization had even entered the Sudan illegally.

26. Fortunately, Christian Solidarity International was not the only group to visit the Sudan: many other credible observers had gone there legally, and none of them had corroborated the organization's allegations of slavery. Christian Solidarity International was one of the main contributors to the distortion of the image of the NGOs working in the field of human rights.

27. Mr. WILSON (Observer for New Zealand) said that his Government was deeply concerned by the recent attacks on United Nations staff and other humanitarian relief workers. In its work in the field of human rights, New Zealand considered it important to balance criticism with a willingness to offer practical assistance. It also believed that all Governments were accountable for compliance with the basic human rights standards.

28. As a member of the Commonwealth, New Zealand was deeply concerned about the situation in Nigeria, where more than 150 people were being held without trial. It appreciated each step taken towards democratic government, but wished to see further evidence of a parallel process leading to the restoration of the rule of law. It was also concerned by the charges of treason recently levelled against Mr. Wole Soyinka and 11 other Nigerians.

29. It was disappointing that the hopes of the two Special Rapporteurs to visit Nigeria had been frustrated. The conditions imposed by the Government had been too restrictive and his delegation considered that the Commission should appoint a special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria. On the other hand, the commitments made by the Government during the visit of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group were of major importance.

30. Although the human rights situations in Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda were not identical, they had important features in common. In particular, his Government was concerned that the fighting and the massive population movements in the Great Lakes region had led to the violation of the human rights of many ordinary citizens, especially women and children. All parties should respect human rights and facilitate access to refugees by international humanitarian agencies.

31. The human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia had improved, but his Government was concerned at evidence of continuing human rights violations there. All parties should implement the provisions of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also urged respect for the rights of minorities in Serbia, particularly in Kosovo.

32. Iraq should respond positively to the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the situation there. Its acceptance of "food for oil" provided a long overdue opportunity to improve the living conditions of vulnerable members of Iraqi society and both parties should move as rapidly as possible to implement Security Council resolution 986 (1995).

33. It was encouraging that the Islamic Republic of Iran was making progress in a number of human rights sectors and was requesting technical assistance. Such progress was, however, offset by the continuing shortcomings in the treatment of religious minorities and women and in freedom of expression.

34. Mr. CORRALES LEAL (Observer for Venezuela) said that a State's actions to promote human rights in other countries were as important as the respect that it accorded to the legitimate aspirations for freedom within its own society. It therefore gave his Government great pleasure to see the positive political developments in Guatemala and Haiti, which had brought about real improvements in the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

35. The signing of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace in Guatemala on 29 December 1996 had marked a huge step forward and held out great hopes for the future of human rights in that country. His country had historic ties with Haiti and had had the satisfaction of having contributed to restoring its democratic system of government and encouraging respect for human rights. It was also gratifying that an office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was to be opened in Colombia.

36. Venezuela had, since the introduction of democracy in 1958, worked hard for peace, justice and development both at home and abroad. To that end, it had introduced and supported international initiatives to strengthen international human rights treaties, as well as striving to improve its own human rights institutions. A new step in that direction was the establishment of a national human rights commission and the declaration of 1997 as the Year of Human Rights.

37. Recognizing that most of Venezuela's human rights problems had arisen in connection with the judicial and prison systems, his Government had embarked on an extensive reform programme to tighten up the administration of justice and to improve prison accommodation. It had also cooperated sincerely with the various special rapporteurs in clarifying points that had been raised within their mandate. His delegation believed that democracy was the system best able to guarantee the enjoyment of human rights everywhere and would support all multilateral efforts to promote individual human rights and those of developing countries.

38. Mr. RAZZOOQI (Observer for Kuwait) said that the report on the situation of human rights in Iraq (E/CN.4/1997/57) starkly portrayed the unimaginable tragedy that the Iraqi regime had imposed on its people, whose civil and political rights were being systematically violated. As paragraphs 17-24 showed, there had been no progress in the effort to secure the release of 600 prisoners of war, Kuwaiti and third-country nationals.

39. Iraq's failure to help families torn apart by the loss of their loved ones was cruel and immoral. It was responsible for all persons taken into its custody and should cooperate with efforts to determine their whereabouts or fate. There were 16,199 unresolved cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances, but Iraq had responded to only a few. Iraq had, indeed, the worst record in the world in that regard. International pressure must be brought to bear to make Iraq comply with all Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 686 (1991), which stipulated the immediate release of all prisoners and the return of the remains of any deceased ones.

40. Mr. MOUSSAEV (Observer for Azerbaijan) said that, as a result of Armenia's armed aggression against his country, 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan had been occupied. Over 18,000 people had been killed and over 50,000 wounded. Several thousand were missing and mass shootings of civilians had occurred. One of the most heinous crimes had been the brutal annihilation of hundreds of people in Khodjaly in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan in February 1992. As a result of such aggression and "ethnic cleansing" there were currently over a million refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan.

41. During the forcible expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, hundreds of relics testifying to the fact that Azerbaijanis had for centuries belonged in what had become Armenia had been destroyed or altered to look Armenian. Islamic places of worship and tombs had been defiled or damaged. The names of some 2,000 towns and villages had been changed and 900 settlements had been looted and destroyed. Furthermore, the occupying forces had begun to settle the occupied Azerbaijani territories.

42. About 5,000 Azerbaijanis were missing, although the whereabouts of 900 were known. The vast majority were being detained without the knowledge of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Azerbaijani hostages and prisoners of war were forced to do heavy labour and were subjected to beating and torture. Hundreds had died in captivity. Armenia openly flouted the norms of international humanitarian law and elementary human morality.

43. Despite four Security Council resolutions unequivocally condemning the occupation, Armenia retained its grip on the occupied Azerbaijani territories and was increasing its military presence. In view of the grave violations of human rights, the Commission should call on the Government of Armenia to withdraw its forces, create the necessary conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and release all Azerbaijani hostages and prisoners of war.

44. U. ABEL (Observer for Myanmar) said his delegation had circulated two documents (E/CN.4/1997/123 and 124) to counter the unsubstantiated allegations made against its country under agenda item 10. His Government had offered the country's rebel groups an opportunity to lay down their arms. All of them had accepted except the Karen National Union (KNU), a politically bankrupt and militarily weakened force which did not have the support of the 2.7 million Kayins. The so-called Karen refugee camps on the border were, in fact, safe havens for the armed group and its sympathisers from which terrorist attacks against civilians were being staged.

45. The implementation of human rights in the national context should be the responsibility of individual Governments not a pretext for interfering in the domestic affairs of States. That did not mean that human rights could be systematically violated with impunity, but they should be promoted through international cooperation and consensus building.

46. Mr. NASSERI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that during the past two sessions of the Commission, it had heard many convincing arguments in favour of replacing the existing confrontational approach by genuine dialogue, understanding and transparency. However, the Commission's discussions had been reduced to the usual tug of war. A case in point was the question of the human rights situation in his country.

47. At the Commission's last session, the sponsors of the draft resolution on Iran proposed by the European Union had cited time constraints as a reason for an inability to reach a consensus. Prior to the opening of the current session, his delegation had informed the sponsors that it was prepared to work towards a consensus resolution based on the report of the Special Representative on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (E/CN.4/1997/63), despite the fact that it considered that report to have been influenced by misinformation from terrorist groups. The sponsors had, however, tabled their draft resolution even before the presentation of the report and without informing his delegation of their intention to do so. Moreover, the draft resolution was in sharp contrast to the report and the sponsors had emphasized that it had not been their primary source of information.

48. His delegation did not believe that the situation of human rights in Iran called for monitoring by a special representative and strongly objected to the content of the report. However, since the Special Representative had, in fact, been appointed, his report should at least be read and should form the basis of any resolution. The report included a short executive summary, which the Special Representative had invited the sponsors to make use of in drafting their resolution but they had not done so.

49. The Government of Iran had informed the Special Representative that one reason for its failure to invite him to visit the country was the fact that his reports appeared irrelevant to the sponsors of the annual draft resolution. At a time when much ado was being made about the need to limit United Nations expenditures, the allocation of scarce resources to a futile exercise appeared ridiculous. It might be more appropriate to dismantle the special representative procedure and replace it by the situations mechanism under resolution 1503 (XLVIII).

50. His Government was prepared to continue its cooperation with the Special Representative, to accept a consensus resolution if it was based on the text of the executive summary of the Special Representative's report and used its wording, and to accept an extension of the mandate of the Special Representative.

51. Mr. NAZARIAN (Observer for Armenia) said that the situation in Cyprus must be resolved on the basis of United Nations resolutions and recommendations. His Government supported the legitimate demand of the Greek Cypriots in the occupied territory for restoration of their fundamental human rights and freedoms and preservation of their cultural heritage.

52. Nagorno Karabakh had also been the victim of violations of the basic human rights for over a century. Its population had been subjected to mass expulsion, the plundering of villages and towns and unjustified killing with sophisticated weapons of mass destruction. Some members of the international community, misled by Azerbaijani propaganda, thought that the conflict could be resolved by denying the right to self-determination of the population of Nagorno Karabakh or restricting it within the territory of Azerbaijan. Such a scenario would force the population to live under the permanent threat of genocide and deportation.

53. Mr. WADLOW (Association for World Education) said that conspiracy theories served as an ideological basis for both anti-government terrorists and government-sponsored repression. Both sides used the same dangerous accusations, often based on hearsay or very slim evidence, some of which surfaced even in the Commission. Speakers should therefore be compelled to provide proof of their statements. In that connection, he noted that the right of reply was denied to NGOs.

54. If there was disagreement concerning the facts, fact-finding procedures must be established. Education was also necessary to indicate that social forces were complex and that society was not manipulated by hidden forces. World conspiracies simply did not exist. The spotlight of reason should be

brought to bear on such theories; otherwise they would spread and undermine confidence and trust. He drew attention to his Organization's written statement (E/CN.4/1997/NGO/85).

55. Mr. SRIVASTAVA (International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies) said that the number of countries in which terrorist incidents took place increased every year, as a result of industrialization, development and, particularly, the growth of fundamentalism. Terrorism had been called "low intensity warfare" and, sometimes supported by other States, aimed at destabalizing established Governments. That had an extremely damaging effect, especially in democratic countries. No person or country in the world could claim enjoyment of human rights until all States were compelled to prohibit, without loopholes, the use of their territory for the recruitment, training, assembly, transit or financing of terrorism.

56. Mr. FAI (International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations) said that Indian military and paramilitary forces were committing deliberate, systematic and officially-sanctioned human rights violations in Kashmir with complete impunity.

57. The unsolved murder of Jalil Andrabi, Chairman of the Kashmir Commission of Jurists, was a challenge to human rights activists and, in particular, to the Commission. Mr. Andrabi had died a painful death because he had drawn the Commission's attention to the sufferings in his homeland.

58. The Commission's failure to speak out against the atrocities committed in Kashmir amounted to abetment and encouragement of tyranny. If such acts were not to be condoned within a Member State, there was all the more reason for the United Nations to intervene when the territory in question was disputed. The Kashmiris welcomed the initiation of talks between India and Pakistan but it was their future that was at stake and they believed that tripartite negotiations among India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir were the only means of resolving the crisis.

59. Ms. MARTINEZ NIETO (United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation) said that her organization was disturbed by the situation of monks in Tibet and dissidents in China and Equatorial Guinea. It welcomed the signing of a peace treaty between the Government and guerrilla forces in Guatemala and supported programmes for international cooperation which were demonstrating that international solidarity was the best means of encouraging the transition to democracy in many countries.

60. At the beginning of the current session, her organization had been warned by Cuban delegates to the Commission not to raise the question of human rights in that country. It had been told that if it turned over its allotted time on any agenda item to Cuban citizens living in Miami (United States), it would lose its consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. Thus, her delegation had been blackmailed in the highest United Nations human rights forum. She assured the Commission, however, that the pressure exerted on her organization would not prevent it from continuing to support the Cuban people in its struggle for freedom.

61. She welcomed the Special Rapporteur's report on the situation of human rights in Cuba (E/CN.4/1997/53) but regretted that the Government had not allowed the Special Rapporteur to visit that country. She expressed concern at the harassment to which the Concilio Cubano (Cuban Council) of human rights organizations had been subjected, particularly Mrs. Zohiris Aquilar Calleja, whose husband had founded the Concilio Cubano and who was about to be evicted from her home for failure to pay the rent after being dismissed from her post pursuant to a government decree. A number of independent Cuban journalists and writers had also been subjected to persecution.

62. Ms. GIRMA (African Association of Education for Development) said it was unfair to condemn countries in a state of civil war for human rights abuses without mentioning the role of external powers in such conflicts. Wars were being waged in Africa that were not in the interests of the countries involved but were the result of sponsorship of the warring factions by countries whose own human rights records were poor.

63. The report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Zaire (E/CN.4/1997/6) stated that the Zairian Government and much of civil society were hostile towards the international community, which they believed was conspiring against the country and was the cause of all its problems. It should not be forgotten that Marshal Mobutu had himself come to power with the help of the United States, which had supported him because Angola and Mozambique were allied to his opponent, Patrice Lumumba. In the same way, Mr. Kabila was currently being groomed for power; in fact, both Marshal Mobutu and Mr. Kabila had worked together during the Congo crisis.

64. The crisis in the Great Lakes region was linked to the situation in the Horn of Africa through Uganda's conflict with the Sudan. Africa must not become a battleground where external forces waged a crusade or a jihad, especially in countries such as Eritrea and Ethiopia where Christianity and Islam had coexisted harmoniously for centuries. Despite the change of Government in those countries in 1991, when both the United States and the Sudan had assisted the rebels' rise to power, they were again in a state of civil war.

65. Although flagrant human rights violations were being committed in Ethiopia, the Prime Minister of that country was soon to be honoured by the United States Government. In so doing, the United States was encouraging human rights abuse and condoning impunity.

66. Ms. KEIHANIZADEH (International Falcon Movement) said that, while the situation of human rights in some places had improved as a result of the Commission's efforts, it had worsened in others, such as Iran, where 1996 had set a record for some types of human rights violations. Religious minorities, writers, intellectuals and women had been subjected to persecution under a criminal code which reflected neither the country's own culture nor Islam. The killing of Iranian dissidents abroad had been traced to the highest levels of that country's Government and State-sponsored terrorism was the basis of the country's foreign policy.

67. It was clear from the Special Representative's report (E/CN.4/1997/63) that the Iranian Government had refused to grant him permission to pay another visit to Iran because of the Commission's expression of concern over continued human rights violations there. The Iranian regime was attempting, by blackmailing the Special Representative, to prevent the Commission from adopting a resolution on the matter. The Special Representative's visit to Iran must be unconditional; to propose a compromise would only aggravate human rights violations there. The Commission must adopt a resolution strongly condemning the systematic violations of human rights in Iran and must refer the matter to the Security Council for the adoption of the necessary measures.

68. Ms. KABIR (International Progress Association) said that mercenaries posed a new and serious threat to the human rights of people around the world. They represented a new ideology that sought to overthrow democracies by violence which it was difficult for civilized societies to defend themselves against especially when it was perpetrated by State-sponsored mercenaries.

69. Harkat al-Ansar, one of the main terrorist groups based in Pakistan, had been receiving assistance from Pakistani Intelligence, according to a recent report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and maintained terrorist training camps, where Muslim militants were prepared for action in Kashmir, Bosnia and, in the future, China. In Indian Kashmir, it was spearheading a religious war to establish a fundamentalist polity. It was high time to end the indulgence shown towards terrorist groups like Harkat al-Ansar which, with the encouragement of Pakistan, had even been allowed to call openly for war against India.

70. Ms. RUPPRECHT (International Institute for Peace) said that, in Pakistan, women had been reduced, under the hudud laws, to the status of second-class citizens. Christians, Hindus and minority Muslim sects had all been the victims of violence. In 1994, 89 people had been killed in sectarian violence between Shiites and Sunni Muslims, and the situation was getting worse. The President of Pakistan had himself admitted that thousands of people in Pakistan had been deprived of their right to life and killed in police custody.

71. The violence in Pakistan was often blamed on the spread of narcotics. The Prime Minister of Pakistan had reportedly told the Washington Post that he had declined an offer by top army officers to use drug money to finance covert operations. United States experts on terrorism had detailed how Pakistani military intelligence used drug money to finance terrorist operations in India. If the Government of Pakistan was really committed to democratic principles and human rights, it should close down the arms bazaars, disband groups like Harkat al-Ansar, protect minorities and women, and prosecute drug dealers.

72. Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan), speaking on a point of order, said that the Commission appeared to have become an arena where NGOs could parade their hatred and hurl abuse.

73. The CHAIRMAN said that the representative of Pakistan would have an opportunity to reply at a later stage.

74. Mr. TAW (Worldview International Foundation) said that systematic human rights abuses were prevalent along the Thai/Burmese border, since the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) had launched a major offensive against the Karen National Union in February 1997. Hundreds of thousands of people had been displaced, forcibly relocated or driven into Thailand. SLORC had blocked the evacuation routes of thousands more who wished to flee, and who were stranded with inadequate food, water, shelter and medical supplies.

75. In Shan State, villagers outside the relocation sites were being shot on sight by the Burmese army. In Karenni State, villages had been razed and landmines laid as part of the forced relocation campaign.

76. The living conditions of the thousands of villagers scattered in the jungle were appalling and disease was rampant. Numerous human rights were being violated: forced porterage, rape, torture, summary executions, arbitrary detentions, burning and looting had all been documented. SLORC forces were also terrorizing refugees just inside the Thai border and were responsible for burning down two refugee camps, leaving over 10,000 people homeless.

77. He urged the Commission to emphasize the crisis along the Thai/Burmese border in its resolution on the situation of human rights in Burma; the international community to continue its humanitarian operations along the border and help move refugee camps further inside Thailand; and the Government of Thailand to continue its tradition of humanitarian assistance and not to repatriate any refugees until peace was restored in Burma. SLORC must end its campaign against civilians and political opponents and seek national reconciliation through dialogue.

78. Mr. SOTTAS (World Organization Against Torture) said that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to ignore the many United Nations resolutions condemning violations of human rights in that country, and had refused to allow a second visit by the Commission's Special Representative. Summary executions and disappearances continued to be recorded, and the use of torture was widespread. The number of official executions had doubled between 1995 and 1996 and it was difficult to determine the real reasons for those executions owing to the regime's custom of presenting political opponents as common criminals.

79. Sunni Muslims, Christians and Baha'is were still persecuted, with some being tortured and killed. The long catalogue of human rights abuses in Iran was well-documented; the task of the Commission was to find a way of implementing the relevant United Nations resolutions.

80. Mr. SAÉNZ, (World Organization Against Torture) said he was a Colombian who had been kidnapped and held for eight months, and that more than 1,000 people a year were kidnapped in Colombia. The most of them were held to ransom, while the rest were kidnapped for political or other reasons. Kidnapping for financial gain had added a new and cruel dimension to the

conflict in Colombia, which was causing 30,000 deaths a year. Government measures to combat kidnapping were well-intended but ineffective, and only the immediate release of all the persons concerned would restore the Colombian people's trust in democracy. Opposition groups appeared to be exploiting the difficult economic, social and political situation in Colombia to distract attention from their new source of income.

81. He hoped that the new Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, would give the international community greater insight into the fratricidal war and help it to find solutions and avoid similar tragedies elsewhere.

82. Ms. FENG Gui (All-China Women's Federation) said the United States of America was one of the most violent and racist societies in the world. Its record on women's rights was appalling: more than 6 million women were beaten up and 4,000 killed every year; one out of three American women was the victim of domestic violence; half a million women were raped every year; and sexual harassment had reached epidemic proportions, with 76 per cent of women claiming harassment in the workplace. The human rights abuses suffered by black and coloured women were too numerous to mention.

83. Moreover, the United States had violated the rights of women in other countries, during the 60 wars it had instigated and through its military bases. The raping and killing of local women by United States soldiers around the world exposed the hypocrisy of the supposed concern of the United States for human rights. The United States had brutally abused the rights of Chinese women in the past and refused to acknowledge the progress made in the human rights situation in China.

84. The Governments of the United States, the Netherlands and Denmark should solve the problems of racial discrimination, xenophobia and police violence in their own countries before they started preaching to the rest of the world.

85. Ms. STOTHARD (Aliran Kesedran Negara - National Consciousness Movement) said she rejected the inference that the right to development somehow justified widespread human rights violations in Burma. SLORC asserted that its priority was to ensure Burmese citizens had food and shelter, and yet it was SLORC which had deprived tens of thousands of people of those very things. Refugees at the Thai/Burmese border had testified to the horrific human rights abuses committed by SLORC.

86. About 2 million people had been used as forced labour on infrastructural development projects, in contravention of the Forced Labour Convention, to which Burma was a party. SLORC's assertion that such labour was "voluntary" or "traditional" was incredible; troops forcibly recruited labour and guarded workers at gunpoint. Forced labour had been used by SLORC and its multinational partners to build the gas pipeline in south-east Burma, and was routinely used to improve tourist facilities.

87. In addition, over half a million people had been forcibly relocated away from popular tourist cities and forced to live in appalling conditions. She was particularly disappointed to note that some of those benefiting from such exploitation were member States of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

88. She called upon SLORC to begin a dialogue with the National League for Democracy and with the ethnic groups to seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Burma, and asked the Commission to do everything in its power to facilitate that dialogue.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.